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ABSTRACT

Although the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has provided strong incentives to improve student achievement, many schools do not have the resources needed to help their students succeed. This paper, the second in the "Community Schools in Illinois" series, addresses the role of school-family partnerships to improve the educational environment. The paper focuses on school-family partnerships, a key component of community schools, and provides examples of six types of family involvement in these partnerships: (1) parenting; (2) communicating; (3) volunteering; (4) learning at home; (5) decision making; and (6) collaborating with the community. Noting that the No Child Left Behind application of the Illinois State Board of Education submitted to the U.S. Department of Education had no concrete plan or dedicated resources for enhancing schools' capacities to effectively engage parents, this paper asserts that using parent involvement as a mechanism for educational change is timely because of sanctions under the No Child Left Behind Act, changing demographics of Illinois' schools, changing state government leaders, and a clear need for proven methods to improve student achievement. Recommendations to help address student achievement through meaningful school-parent partnerships include: (1) convening a summit focused on how to make parent involvement an effective and meaningful practice; (2) integrating parent involvement training as part of the preparation process for teachers and administrators; (3) investing resources in parent involvement and leadership initiatives; (4) providing training, technical assistance, and resources on implementing effective family-school partnerships; and (5) expanding the state board of education's plan to include parent involvement. Appended is a list of national and Illinois organizations focusing on family school partnerships. (Contains 24 endnotes.) (KB)

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Illinois Family Partnership Network: Leaders in Action

Illinois Family Partnership Network (IFPN) works to increase family leadership for better programs and policies throughout Illinois. IFPN's work focuses on: 1) building regional networks of parents and community educators and human service providers to share information, learn skills and connect to opportunities; 2) sponsoring leadership skills training for parents and partners on how to be effective advocates for children and families; 3) building partnerships with state and local initiatives to ensure that family leaders are active in decision-making and governance; 4) educating public officials, administrators and local communities about the importance and benefit of family involvement in decision-making.

A primary focus of IFPN's work is to strengthen school family partnerships to improve student learning and school effectiveness.

If you would like to know more about IFPN and its current projects, contact: Stephennie Segrest-Stuckey, Chair, at: 312-516-5559 or email at: stephennie@illinoisfamilypartnership.net.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Schools have been issued an immense challenge to raise student achievement levels with the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Under this legislation, schools that fail to raise achievement levels must offer school choice, then supplemental support services if achievement continues to lag. If student achievement remains low, schools can be restructured and much of the administration and faculty removed. Thus, schools have strong incentives to improve student achievement. But many schools do not have the resources and tools needed to help their students succeed.

This paper, the second in the "Community Schools in Illinois" series, addresses the important role school-family partnerships can and should play in today's changing educational environment. Community schools are hubs for school-linked or school-based services and activities that promote lifelong learning and development for students, families and community members. School-family partnerships, a key component of community schools, are one more tool that all schools should use to help students succeed and prepare for life as a responsible adult.

Opportunities for implementing meaningful school-family partnerships in Illinois are plentiful. These opportunities include:

- Many new state government leaders in Illinois.
- The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.
- A clear need for proven methods to improve student achievement.

If Illinois wants to be successful in raising student achievement and moving schools off the academic watch list, supporting parents efforts to help their children learn and engaging parents in meaningful school improvement activities must be made priorities. Working together, parents, schools and the state can create more opportunities for student success.

The following recommendations will help address student achievement through meaningful school-parent partnerships:

- ➤ Convene a summit, co-hosted by the Governor's Office and Illinois State Board of Education, focused on how to make parent involvement an effective and meaningful practice in every Illinois school.
- ➤ Integrate parent involvement training as a part of the preparation process for teachers, administrators and other school personnel.
- ➤ Invest resources in initiatives that foster parent involvement and leadership on a state and local level.
- ➤ Provide training, technical assistance and resources through the Regional Offices of Education or other intermediaries on implementing effective family-school partnerships.
- ➤ Expand the Illinois State Board of Education's plan for implementing the No Child Left Behind Act to more intentionally include parent involvement.

Family Involvement: A Key Component of Student and School Success

Schools have been issued an immense challenge to raise student achievement levels with the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Under this legislation, schools that fail to raise achievement levels must offer school choice, then supplemental support services if achievement continues to lag. If student achievement remains low, schools can be restructured and much of the administration and faculty removed. Thus, schools have strong incentives to improve student achievement. But many schools do not have the resources and tools needed to help their students succeed.

This paper, the second in the "Community Schools in Illinois" series, addresses the important role school-family partnerships can and should play in today's changing educational environment. Community schools are hubs for school-linked or school-based services and activities that promote lifelong learning and development for students, families and community members. School-family partnerships, a key component of community schools, are one more tool that all schools should use to help students succeed and prepare for life as a responsible adult.

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The term "parent involvement" is used to describe participation by a child's primary caretaker(s) - whether that is a single mom, two parents, grandparents, foster parents or an older sibling. More broadly, many parent involvement programs also address the needs of the entire family and include younger siblings and others' roles in creating school success.

Parents as Partners

Community schools are "partnerships linking schools, families and communities to promote better outcomes for youth, families, schools and communities."[i] The community school framework is built upon the idea of schools forging important connections and forming strong partnerships between themselves, families and local communities. This paper, as part of the "Community Schools in Illinois" series, elaborates on the community schools model by highlighting one key component: parent involvement.

There is a whole "menu" of parent involvement options and different ways of implementing them; by successfully implementing these options in meaningful ways a school can move closer to functioning as a community school. For example, at some schools parent involvement may mean hosting a back-to-school event, family math and reading nights and designating an area in the schools where parents gather to take classes and increase their own skills. At others, there may be parents helping in every classroom, explicit expectations for parent involvement in homework completion and parents serving on school governing councils.

A number of schools across Illinois and the nation already have effective school-family partnerships. Dr. Joyce Epstein of the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University developed a common framework for building parent partnerships. Epstein's framework includes six types of involvement to help educators develop more comprehensive school-family-community partnerships. Based on these types of involvement, schools can choose practices that meet the needs and goals of their students and families. The six involvement types are:

- I - PARENTING: Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.

- II - COMMUNICATING: Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

- III - VOLUNTEERING: Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.

- IV - LEARNING AT HOME: Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities and decisions.

- V - DECISION MAKING: Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations.

- VI - COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY: Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.

In Illinois, some schools now use the PTA standards which were designed to guide families, educators and communities through the process of involving parents in their children's education. These Illinois PTA standards, similar to Joyce Epstein's, include:

- **Communicating - Communication between home and school is regular, two-way and meaningful.**
- **Parenting - Parenting skills are promoted and supported.**
- **Student Learning - Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.**
- **Volunteering - Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.**
- **School Decision-Making and Advocacy - Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.**
- **Collaborating with Community - Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.**

These types of involvement can make family partnership programs more successful and meaningful. Some "real world" examples of family involvement in Illinois demonstrate ways these different types of involvement can help schools and raise student achievement.

Type I - Parenting

At the Chicago Child-Parent Centers, parent activities like health and nutrition instruction and life skills development accompany the preschool classes. "One of the main goals is to help the parents feel good about school. We work on raising their own self-esteem and their skills, so they can be the leaders of their children's education," said Janice Ransom, a parent resource teacher. Children who completed the Chicago program were more likely to graduate from high school and were much less likely to be assigned to special-education classes or to repeat a grade.[ii]

"Parent school involvement in the elementary grades is a significant predictor of educational attainment. Specifically, the number of years in which teachers rated parent school involvement as average or better was associated with higher rates of high school completion and with lower rates of school dropout. In addition, teachers ratings of parent involvement also influenced retention and special education placement." From the August 2000 "Chicago Longitudinal Study Newsletter", written in conjunction with Arthur Reynolds project at Chicago Public Schools.

Encouraging parents to become active participants in their children's education is a main objective of the Parent Involvement initiative at the Chicago Panel on School Policy. The initiative has brought quality, unbiased and accurate information to administrators, educators, parents and students to help overcome barriers to parent involvement and strengthen parents role in their children's education. In addition, the Panel presents two parent forums annually and oversees a city-wide task force on parent involvement.

Type II - Communicating

"Most parents want their kids to do well in school, and if given sufficient information, parents will help," said Rick DuFour, superintendent at Stevenson High School in Lake County. DuFour believes that providing parents with information about their children, particularly positive information, will engage them in their children's learning, even in high school when parent involvement typically declines. Personalized communication humanizes the school environment for parents, teachers and students. For example, Stevenson High School redesigned its grading notification to provide more timely information to parents and facilitate a more efficient system for busy teachers. Parents now stay informed by receiving progress reports for their children every three weeks. Due in large part to the change in school policy facilitating more parent communication, the school has seen As and Bs increase by 50 percent, and Ds and Fs have been cut by almost two-thirds.

Type III - Volunteering

At Woodson South Elementary School in South Chicago, Principal Janice Ledvora sees partnering with families as a key step to ensuring children's academic success. Woodson South first worked to create a welcoming and engaging school environment for students and parents. Then, with help from a parent resource coordinator, Maria Washington, Woodson South developed a structured, ongoing parent-involvement program. Grant funding allowed the school to begin a Read-to-Me program that provides an opportunity for parents to work in the school tutoring students in reading. Overwhelming participation in the reading program prompted Ledvora and colleagues to propose a new program in which parents could receive a stipend for coming to "work" at the school. This program meets work requirements for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families while supporting the parent's professional development through seminars and workshops.

Type IV - Learning at Home

The Academic Development Institute (ADI) in Lincoln, Illinois, works in 194 schools throughout the state with parent educators to implement the Solid Foundation program. This partnership between ADI, the Illinois State Board of Education and the U.S. Department of Education connects families and schools by enhancing reading and study efforts in grades K-5. One component is a home visit to families of children entering third grade. The child receives a free book appropriate to his or her reading level, while the family receives a packet of information about school activities, parent programs and tips to help the child with reading and study habits. Families who have been visited indicated increased reading rates and more timely and effective communication with teachers and administrators in their children's schools. [iii] Solid Foundation also includes the HOME LINKS program in which children and parents complete activities together at home that are closely related to Illinois education standards and classroom learning. HOME LINKS help parents feel connected to children's learning and more easily monitor progress.

"Parent's involvement in their children's schools makes a significant impact on their success in school. What parents have to do is maintain high expectations for their children, which is shown to improve children's performance and increase the likelihood of success. What schools have to do is not one big event, but rather utilize every opportunity to conduct an 'ongoing conversation' with parents throughout the year, keeping parents involved in the school and informed about how their children are doing. This 'ongoing conversation' builds a real relationship between parents, their children and their school, which is beneficial to everyone."

- Sam Redding, Academic Development Institute

Type V – Decision Making

The Springfield chapter of Parents for Public Schools seeks to get parents a "seat at the table" of important decision-making bodies. The mission of this group of parents and advocates is to increase school-family partnerships through education and advocacy while promoting a higher level of accountability in the schools. Parents for Public Schools members sit on a variety of education committees, provide regular summaries of Springfield school board meetings and publish a newsletter informing parents about current educational "happenings" in the Springfield area.

Local School Councils (LSC) were created in Chicago in 1988 with the passage of the Chicago School Reform Act. These advisory bodies consist of six parents, two teachers, two community representatives, a principal and, in high schools, a student. The introduction of parents and community members into the governing structure of Chicago's public schools has created an opportunity for parents to play a vital role in the guidance and supervision of their child's school and in school improvement. LSC members are elected and have the authority to select and evaluate the principal, approve a three-year school improvement plan and develop and approve the school budget.[iv]

The Illinois Family Partnership Network (IFPN) was established in 1997 with the mission of increasing the number of parents who are active in decision-making. IFPN partners are active parents, local and state-wide organizations and public agencies who believe that programs, schools, public services and policies will be more effective when parents are involved in determining how programs and schools operate and how resources are used. In summer 2000, IFPN launched a special effort to "strengthen school-family partnerships" to improve children's success in school and life based on an understanding that parent involvement in children's education is one of the strongest indicators for school success.

Type VI – Collaborating with the Community

The Logan Square Neighborhood Association became involved in public schools in the Logan Square and Avondale communities of Chicago when members realized that parents are crucial to healthy schools. In partnership with Community Organizing and Family Issues, the association launched a parent leadership program that led to the Funston Elementary School Council obtaining funds to develop a community center in the school. The center provides adult literacy programs, child care, support services and recreational programs. This collaboration with the community has helped to improve student outcomes at Funston, with increases in test scores and attendance rates and falling mobility.[v]

The Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform incorporates grassroots and community organizing into its school-family partnerships strategy. The campaign is a national network of school reform leaders from nine cities including Chicago. Cross City officials provide training to parents and other community leaders on a wide range of school improvement topics, including grassroots organizing, school reform and overcoming obstacles to parent and teacher alliances. The network also seeks to improve shared accountability among educators, administrators, parents and the community for teaching all students according to high standards. [vi]

Making a Difference in Student and School Success

A recently released examination of family involvement research by Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp confirms what many researchers, teachers, advocates and others have been saying for years – families have an important impact on children's academic achievement. Indeed, research examined in "A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement" shows that students who have involved parents, regardless of family income or background, are more likely to achieve in a variety of ways. These students are more likely to:

- Get better grades and test scores.
- Pass their classes and not be held back in a grade.
- Have good school attendance.
- Adjust well to school, with better social skills and behavior.
- Go on to higher education.

Given the current nationwide focus on test scores and achievement, these are highly desirable outcomes.

Other important findings from the Henderson and Mapp's study included:

- Families of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds and from all income levels and educational backgrounds are involved with the children's *learning at home*. When it comes to *involvement at school*, however, white, middle-class families are more involved than other types of families.
- Efforts to reach out to families and engage them in their children's learning do work. In addition, schools with higher quality partnership programs show more improvement in student learning, as demonstrated by greater gains on state tests.

The authors found that three key steps were present in most schools that succeeded in engaging families:

- Build trusting relationships between teachers, families and communities that include collaboration efforts.
- Identify, value and attend to families' needs, including cultural and class differences.
- Distribute power between school, families, and communities to form true partnerships.[vii]

Given this information, it is clear that parent involvement can be a valuable and effective tool in helping schools raise student achievement. Schools have a greater ability to reach parents than often previously thought, with school-family partnership policies and practices mattering more than family characteristics in determining how involved parents are. As emphasized by Joyce Epstein, **"At all grade levels, the evidence suggests that school policies, teacher practices and family practices are more important than race, parent education, family size, marital status and even grade level in determining whether parents continue to be part of their children's education."**[viii]

Making a Difference for Parents Too

Parents benefit from partnership programs with schools as well. Often, parents want to be more involved in their children's learning, but do not feel welcome at their children's school or do not know how to be involved.[ix] The Parents as School Partners research initiative of the National Council of Jewish Women found through a series of nationwide focus groups that parents want:

- Better communication with the school.
- To feel welcome at school.
- To show their children that they value education
- To be partners in the process of educating children, with timely notification of problems.
- To receive more information on how to help their children succeed.
- Positive feedback and personalized contact about their children whenever possible.
- More programs and services for children.[x]

By implementing partnership strategies and creating opportunities for parents to become more engaged, parents' attitudes towards the school improve and their commitment to supporting the school increases. In one study, researchers found high schools that implemented multiple types of parent involvement are likely to improve parent attitudes toward the school and to increase the amount of family involvement both at school and at home. The study found that improving communication efforts – Epstein's involvement Type II – was essential to improving all of the other types of involvement. By creating comprehensive parent involvement strategies, most parents, regardless of background, become engaged with their children's education.[xi]

Making parent involvement efforts part of the school structure also helps parents of older students stay connected to the school. As children enter middle and high school, the organizational structure often inhibits effective parent-school partnerships. As children enter secondary school, they are assigned to multiple teachers who are responsible for teaching large numbers of students. Thus, the nature of teacher-student and teacher-family relationships changes and teachers are less likely to regularly communicate with families or encourage their active involvement.[xii] Therefore, the best outcomes occur when schools institutionalize communications and other parent involvement strategies.

Truly supporting parent involvement also means engaging their parents as active, lifelong learners. Schools and the community have key roles to play in creating a venue that promotes family and adult education, literacy and civic engagement by parents and others adults.[xiii]

Working Together to Support All Parents

Imagine if every school truly considered parents to be partners in the education process and was prepared to support parents in their efforts to help their children succeed. With the active involvement of parents, Illinois, its students and its schools could be achieving at higher levels and be much closer to meeting the goals of the new federal education legislation, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

"When parents are involved in their children's education at home, they do better in school. And when parents are involved in school, children go farther in school–and the schools they go to are better."

–A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement. A.T. Henderson and N. Berla. Washington, D.C.: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

Unfortunately, Illinois has a long way to go before this dream can become a reality. For example, the No Child Left Behind application the Illinois State Board of Education recently submitted to the Federal Department of Education makes only a few references to parent involvement and has no concrete plan or dedicated resources for enhancing schools' capacities to effectively engage parents. The plan mentions informing and utilizing parents, but fails to outline ways schools will be expected to implement these ideas and be held accountable for increasing parent involvement.

A Time for Change

The time is right to shift parent involvement from an underutilized resource to a mechanism for real change. Schools with low-academic achievement must quickly improve students' academic performance or risk sanctions under the new No Child Left Behind Act.

Parent involvement efforts alone will not be enough to help failing schools, but they can be one valuable method for helping schools and children as part of a broader school reform effort. Current funding opportunities, changes in state leadership and changes in Illinois and teacher demographics make this the right time to focus on parent involvement.

Several funding sources are currently available to support schools in their important role in implementing successful parent involvement efforts. School districts that receive more than $500,000 in Title I funding are required to reserve at least 1 percent for "parental involvement activities." While $5,000 is a minimal investment, it is important that parent involvement has been defined, recognized and allocated funds through this bill. Unfortunately, all schools do not fall under the jurisdiction of this requirement, receiving either no Title I funding or less than $500,000.

Funding for parental involvement activities is also available through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization. This federal program, administered by the states, will provide Illinois with over $30 million per year to sub-grant to schools with a concentration of low-income and low-achieving students for after-school enrichment activities. Though the program focuses on academic enrichment for students, literacy and other learning activities for parents can also be supported through this funding.

At the state level, support for school-family partnership programs could potentially arise through the many changes in leadership in Illinois government. Between the governor's election, state legislative elections and changes in leadership at the State Board of Education, there will be many new faces leading Illinois. By acting now, schools, families and policymakers can help these new leaders understand the importance of parent involvement and the potential impact it can have on Illinois' schools with the proper support.

Another reason to increase focus on parent involvement is the changing demographics of Illinois' schools. In 1999, Illinois public school students spoke 107

languages and 137,717 students participated in bilingual education programs.[xiv] The number of Hispanic and Native American children in Illinois increased by 68.8 percent and 52.3 percent, respectively, from 1990 to 2000. These societal changes require a culturally competent education system. Parents know their children best and can help teachers to understand cultural factors affecting children's learning. Also, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act requires that all subgroups of students (low-income, non-English speaking, minority and special education) reach federal standards.

Coupled with the ever-diversifying student population are great changes in household demographics and workforce demands. In 1999, 72.2 percent of mothers with children under 18 were working.[xv] Between 1977 and 1997, fathers' average workweek rose three hours, and mothers' increased five hours.[xvi] In 2000, single parents headed 21.9 percent of Illinois households with children.[xvii]

Changes in the structure of public assistance to low-income families have created additional shifts in workforce participation. Between 1997 and 2001, the number of families and children in Illinois on Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) dropped by 78.1 percent. This decline indicates that there are many more Illinois families in the workforce today.[xviii] With the imposition of time limits on how long a parent can receive TANF, a strong emphasis on moving recipients from welfare to work and an increase in two-working parent families, traditional parental involvement during school hours is often an unrealistic option.[xix] As parents are working longer and trying harder to integrate work and family, so too should the educational system account for workforce changes in its strategies to engage parents in their children's education.

Another change in Illinois schools presents a unique challenge and opportunity. Between 2001 and 2005, Illinois schools will need to hire between 46,000 and 64,000 teachers and between 7,000 and 12,000 administrators.[A] About 60 percent of the projected demand for teachers will need to be met by first-time teachers. This new entering corps of teachers presents the opportunity to make parental involvement training a standard part of educator preparation.[xx] Currently, only between 45 percent and 70 percent of teachers receive *any* parent involvement information, but most teachers want more educational support around parental involvement.[xxi] If every teacher who enters Illinois schools over the next five years receives parental involvement training as part of their pre-certification requirements, one-third to one-half of the workforce will be formally trained in the importance of promoting school-family partnerships.

Making Change Happen

Implementing effective school-family partnerships in schools across Illinois requires efforts on many levels. Schools, teachers, districts, parents, and the state all have important roles to play in making these partnerships a reality. These entities share responsibility for implementing and carrying out effective parent involvement practices.

Schools are obviously key players in school-family partnerships. Schools must find the appropriate level and structure of school-family partnerships to meet the community's needs. Principals can provide invaluable leadership and promote the value of parent involvement to teachers and families. School boards need to fully accept and promote family involvement in order to help the entire community understand the importance of school-family partnerships.[xxii] Either the school or district can hold in-service trainings for teachers, administrative staff and school personnel about the benefits of parental involvement and incorporating it into daily activities.

Teachers have a very important role to play in the actual implementation of school-family partnerships. While a school may decide to start a parent involvement program, its success is likely to be largely dependent on teacher initiative.[xxiii] Teachers can be parents' allies in creating a web of support for students; if teachers recognize the importance of these partnerships and promote them, chances for student success improve.

[A] In 2001, there were 127,323 teachers in Illinois. In coming years, a larger percentage of the teacher workforce will become eligible for retirement, more teachers are leaving the profession earlier in their careers and enrollment is predicted to continue increasing. Thus, the demand for so many new teachers.

Without teacher support, however, reform efforts are likely to stop at the classroom door. Thus, efforts to train teachers about the importance of parent involvement and how to forge strong partnerships should be made immediately, both for pre-service and in-service teachers. Teachers are already under pressure to raise academic achievement and have many demands on their time, requiring schools and districts to support teachers in their efforts to implement parent involvement strategies.

Districts and Regional Offices of Education (ROE) also play a valuable role in supporting these partnerships across Illinois, since they help coordinate services in and among local schools across a broad region. For example, in the District 32 ROE serving Kankakee and Iroquois counties, staff and administration have implemented several initiatives to engage parents in education. The ROE hosts staff development workshops throughout the year to help teachers and administrators incorporate effective strategies for working with families in their districts. Because ROEs have the ability to reach a larger audience than individual schools, they can be instrumental in educating the state about the importance of family involvement, such as when District 32 purchased billboards advertising the importance of family involvement.

State support and leadership is essential to successful parent involvement. State policy-makers can develop and promote a vision for improving student learning that incorporates the critical role of families and communities as well as schools. The state can hold education accountable for investing resources and providing technical assistance to support parent involvement efforts across Illinois.

Parents overwhelmingly want their children to succeed and most are willing to be more involved in their children's schooling. More children are in families where both or the only parent work, making it necessary for schools to establish flexible approaches that accommodate parents' other commitments. Parents can serve in myriad ways, from learning how to support their children's learning at home to serving on advisory and decision-making bodies. Parents can also play a valuable role by making sure states and schools follow through on implementing any promised or required parent involvement initiatives. For example, parents could encourage schools to include data on the level of parent involvement as part of the required school report card. Such information would improve school accountability, while also providing parents with additional information to help evaluate their children's school.[xxiv]

Bringing together all of the key players discussed above is vital to success. A good number of Illinois schools are already implementing successful school-family partnerships and have valuable knowledge that should be shared with other schools. Teachers, principals, and parents from different schools could learn from each other, while the state could use the input of each of these groups to help shape state policy.

"Parents are the first and most influential educators that children will ever have. Trying to teach children without involving parents is like raking leaves in high wind."

- Dr. Kimberly Muhammad-Earl, executive director of the Chicago Public Schools' Parent and Community Training Academy

Recommendations

Parents are currently an underutilized resource in Illinois schools. By building effective, meaningful school-family partnerships across Illinois, schools will have additional resources for improving achievement and helping every student succeed. Achieving the goals and standards of No Child Left Behind is creating a sense of urgency for schools to think and work differently. Parent involvement is a crucial building block for schools as they work to support student success and achieve the goals of No Child Left Behind.

The timing is right for increasing school-family partnerships in Illinois. Many parent involvement strategies do not cost a lot of money, which is an important consideration during these tight fiscal years. In addition, incoming new leadership in Illinois presents a unique window of opportunity for implementing real change. Working together, parents, schools and the state can create more opportunities for success for Illinois' students.

- Convene a summit, co-hosted by the Governor's Office and Illinois State Board of Education, focused on how to make parent involvement an effective and meaningful practice in every Illinois school. A summit would provide a forum for exchanging ideas, sharing best practices and planning for Illinois' future.
    - Schools need immediate guidance on how to incorporate parents into their planning processes under new laws and parents want to be more involved in their children's education. The state can play a valuable role in connecting the two.

- Integrate parent involvement training as part of the preparation process for teachers, administrators and other school personnel. Offer training on family involvement, partnership and diversity in pre-service teacher preparation programs and in on-going professional development opportunities for all school staff.

- Invest resources in initiatives that foster parent involvement and leadership, on a state and local level, so that parents have meaningful opportunities to engage in their children's education and in school improvement. As parents become more knowledgeable and skilled, more children will succeed and schools will be more likely to meet the challenges ahead.

- Provide training, technical assistance and resources through the Regional Offices of Education or other intermediaries to assist schools in determining how to best implement family-schools partnerships.:
    - While leadership from principals can be invaluable in implementing parent involvement programs, state policy-makers have a valuable role to play as well in making sure these programs are implemented.

- Expand the Illinois State Board of Education's plan for implementing the No Child Left Behind Act to more intentionally include parent involvement. The current plan makes minimal references to parent involvement and fails to propose concrete strategies for ensuring that school-family partnerships are established as an integral part of education reform in Illinois. Future planning must include meaningful investments in parent involvement efforts.
    - Parent involvement must be embedded in all school reform efforts – as school-family partnerships are a key tool to school improvement and student success.

Illinois schools face a daunting challenge in the years ahead as they try to improve student achievement. Parents can and should be schools' partners in creating a web of support to help children learn. Now is the time to strengthen school-family partnerships, children, families and schools can all benefit.

Endnotes

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Appendix

National Organizations

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
(NCPIE)
3929 Old Lee Highway, Suite 91-A
Fairfax, VA 22030-2401
Tel: 703-359-8973
http://www.ncpie.org

The School Family Partnership Project
CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning)
University of Illinois at Chicago
Department of Psychology (m/c 285)
1007 W. Harrison St.
Chicago, IL 60607-7137
312-413-1012
www.casel.org/edprepfr.htm

NCREL (North Central Regional Education Lab)
1120 East Diehl Road, Suite 200
Naperville, IL 60563
800-356-2735
www.ncrel.org

National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools
SEDL (Southwest Educational Development Lab)
211 East Seventh Street
Austin, TX 78701-3281
800-476-6861
http://www.sedl.org/connections/

Parent Teacher Association – PTA
330 North Wabash Avenue, Suite 2100
Chicago, IL 60611
312-670-6782
www.pta.org

FINE (Family Involvement Network of Educators)
Harvard Family Research Project
Longfellow Hall
Appian Way
Cambridge, MA 02138
Tel: 617-495-9108
http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~hfrp/projects/fine.html

Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform
407 South Dearborn Street, Suite 1500
Chicago, IL 60605
312.322.4880
http://www.crosscity.org

Institute for Responsive Education
21 Lake Hall
Northeastern University
Boston, MA 02115
Phone: 617/373-2595
http://www.responsiveeducation.org/

FAST– Families and Schools Together
National Training and Evaluation Center
2801 International Lane Suite 105
Madison, WI 53704
TEL (608) 663-2382
http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/fast/index.htm

Illinois

Illinois State Board of Education
100 North First Street
Springfield, IL 62777
217-782-4321
www.isbe.net

Illinois Early Learning Project
ERIC/EECE
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Children's Research Center
51 Gerty Drive
Champaign, IL 61820-7469
http://www.illinoisearlylearning.org

Academic Development Institute
121 North Kickapoo Street
Lincoln, IL 62656
Phone: 217-732-6462
http://families-schools.org

Illinois Family Partnership Network - IFPN
c/o 208 South LaSalle Street, Suite 1490
Chicago, IL 60604
312-516-5559
www.illinoisfamilypartnership.net

Community Organizing and Family Issues – COFI
954 West Randolph, 4th Floor
Chicago, IL 60607
312-226-5141
cofi@mindspring.com

Parents United for Responsible Education – PURE
407 South Dearborn, Street, # 515
Chicago, IL 60605
312-461-1994
www.pureparents.org

This paper was written to stimulate discussion about community schools because community schools can promote lifelong learning and development for all of Illinois' children, youth, families and communities. To further create that discussion, and to put Illinois on a path toward meeting our recommendations, we would like to request that readers disseminate this paper.

Please feel free to make multiple copies.

VOICES FOR ILLINOIS CHILDREN

About Voices for Illinois Children

Voices for Illinois Children is a statewide, non-profit, non-partisan group of child advocates who work with families, communities and policy makers to ensure that all children grow up healthy, nurtured, safe and well educated. Through policy analysis, public education and outreach, Voices generates support from civic, business and community leaders for cost-effective and practical proposals to improve the lives of Illinois children. Jerome Stermer is the President of Voices for Illinois Children, and James J. Mitchell III is the Chair of the Board of Directors.

If you would like to provide feedback on this paper or learn more about community schools, please call Voices for Illinois Children at (312)456-0600 or e-mail at kfitzgerald@voices4kids.org.

If you would like to sign up for Voices' newsletter, "Community Schools Online", please e-mail kfitzgerald@voices4kids.org. You can also call (312)456-0600 to receive a faxed copy of the newsletter.

If you would like to hold a forum about community schools and other issues that affect your community, please call Voices at (312)456-0600 for a free copy of our Community Forum Discussion Guide.

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